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Moon Garden Evolution

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Backyard Birding
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Photo Credit: Dawn Stranden



Photo Credit: Robin and Arlene Karpan

COVER: For Darin and Megan Larson-Wilkie, there is no better moment than one spent enjoying the results of their gardening labours. For this couple, a landscape beautiful by both day and night is the ultimate reward. Photo by Lillian Lane.

HOME front



What a difference a few months have made. I'm sure you have heard it all a million times by now, but the world is a different place than it was before 'social distancing' became a regular part of our vocabulary. We have been publishing *Saskatoon HOME* magazine for 13 years and thought we had seen just about everything in that time, but we can all agree that life right now is genuinely unique. But we Saskatonians are no strangers to hardship and, as with all

challenges, our Saskatchewan spirit and tenacity will prevail.

Our good old-fashioned values and hard work have already begun to pay off. We are supporting our frontline workers by staying home, we are checking in on our neighbours, and we are ordering online from local businesses to keep them afloat. We may be physically apart, but our community spirit is alive and well.

As we slowly reopen and get back to our daily lives, we encourage you to shop local and support our Saskatoon business community. The advertisers you see in this magazine are not just companies—they are your friends, neighbours, and families who are providing great services as well as keeping food on their employees' tables. We urge you to support these local businesses.

Our mission at *Saskatoon HOME* magazine has always been to showcase local stories by local homeowners right here in Saskatoon. With this in mind, enjoy this issue as a safe place to escape and relax from the outside world. I know these stories will bring a smile to your face as you discover more amazing home projects right here in Saskatoon.

Stay safe and healthy, and don't forget to wash those hands!

Amanda Soulodre

OWNER & PUBLISHER

HOME

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WITH BRITT

THIS ISSUE: *PALLET PROJECTS*



BRITT ARNASON

A little about Britt...

Britt Arnason is a Saskatchewan girl who now calls Saskatoon home. She is a renovator who works for herself, buying, overhauling and then renting out her properties to long-term—and in some projects—short-term renters. Britt learned how to do renovations herself, only hiring out the plumbing and electrical. Today she owns and rents 13 'doors' (a combination of single-family homes and duplexes) throughout the province. ➤

**Watch for Britt's Fall issue
*DIY — Industrial Hardware***

Want more inspiration? IG: @investorgirlbritt

DIY PALLET PROJECTS



Pallet projects have really increased in popularity in the last few years. And for good reason! Pallets are often free and are a great source of wood. Reusing a pallet is also environmentally responsible, keeping the wood from the waste stream. And because the wood is different pallet to pallet, every project is unique.

Shipping pallets (sometimes called “skids”) are used in freight shipping. The most common type of pallet is made of wood, but not all pallets are alike. They differ in dimension, weight, strength, board size, type of wood and condition. So in your

search to start a project make sure the wood matches your end vision.

It is also important to think about how the end project will be used. Not all, but some pallets use treated wood or have hauled materials that make them inappropriate for use in certain projects. For example, is it food safe? Look online for the many lists you can use as a check list to help you determine if a pallet you are eyeing up has any signs that would be a red flag for you.

There are so many project ideas out there, but here are a few for inspiration I have completed.

FINDING FREE PALLET

Free pallets are often posted online on Facebook Marketplace and Kijiji. The north industrial area of Saskatoon is also a treasure trove, with businesses placing Free Pallet signs outside on unwanted material.

FREEING THE BOARDS FROM A PALLET: TWO METHODS

PRY BAR AND HAMMER

If all you have are basic tools, using a pry bar and hammer to pull your pallet apart will do the job. Take them apart by prying up the nails, pulling the boards off, and then clawing the nails out.

PULL OUT YOUR SAWS

A much faster method is to use a circular saw to cut off end stringers. Then pry the boards from the middle stringer until you have enough room to get the blade of a reciprocating saw to cut through nails in middle board. Be sure to use a wood and nail blade with this method. Removing the nail heads may be necessary, depending on the project you are doing.



PALLET BACKSPLASH



I chose a herringbone pattern for this project, and used an online calculator to figure out the angles I needed based on my board size. I chose not to stain them, and instead found pallet boards with all sorts of natural colours. I just sanded the boards and used a clear coat varnish to seal them. Looking back, I would have selected a polyurethane protective finish instead. ➤

Know the Code

Fire code requires a clearance of at least 18 inches between gas burners and flammable surrounding materials. Check local requirements; you may need to incorporate tile, stainless steel, or tempered glass behind the cooktop.



ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

The project ideas are endless. Coat hooks, shelves, benches, garden walls, mirror frames and outdoor furniture.

Here are a few other ideas from projects I have completed using pallets. Have fun! (i)

House Numbers



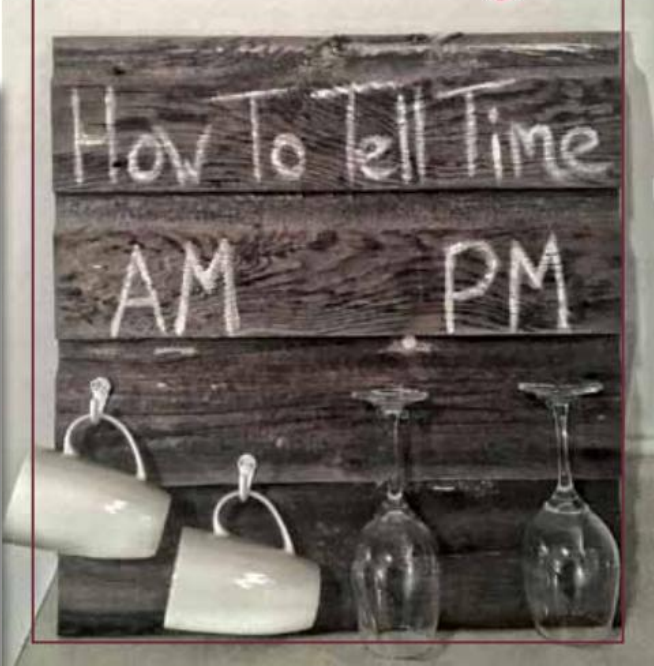
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MOON GARDEN EVOLUTION

AN ENCHANTING ESCAPE, BY DAY AND NIGHT

When visitors catch their first glimpse of Megan and Darin Larson-Wilkie's Rosewood backyard, they're often taken aback. Flourishing Virginia creeper climbs up the lattice that envelops their spacious cedar pergola, raised beds overflow with vegetables and herbs, while tall native grasses, ornamental trees

and lush hanging baskets add colour and vertical interest.

"I think partly because we are youngish and it's not something you might expect from people our age," says Megan, explaining why visitors are often surprised. They also don't expect to see such an established garden in a newer neighbourhood like Rosewood, she adds.

"But we just jumped right in, right away."

Darin bought the house a year before meeting Megan, and it was still a blank canvass when she moved in. They got to work in 2015, drawing on the knowledge they had acquired from taking several gardening courses at the University of Saskatchewan.

The couple knew where they wanted to situate the pergola and garden beds, which helped determine the flow of the south-facing yard. "They were our anchors for the rest of our design," says Megan.

The Making of a Moon Garden

During the planning stage, they thought they'd primarily use the space in the



JULIE BARNES



LILLIAN LANE

evenings, so they settled on creating a “moon garden.” That involved adding solar lights, planting evening-scented flowers and selecting plants with lighter foliage and flowers that “pop in the moonlight,” says Megan. Lilacs and evening-scented stock created the fragrance they were looking for.

They also grew corn for

a few summers, which they enjoyed hearing rustling in the breeze at night. Over time, they realized they were spending more daylight hours in the garden than they expected, so they added some purple flowers to the mix.

Megan and Darin handled most of the work themselves, including the construction of the pergola, which took ➤



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Last summer, about 200 people visited Megan and Darin's garden when it was a stop on a garden tour. "We got a lot of questions about the pergola, which tells me that people are looking for spaces to entertain, convene and congregate," says Megan.



Russell the cat stretches out in the shade.



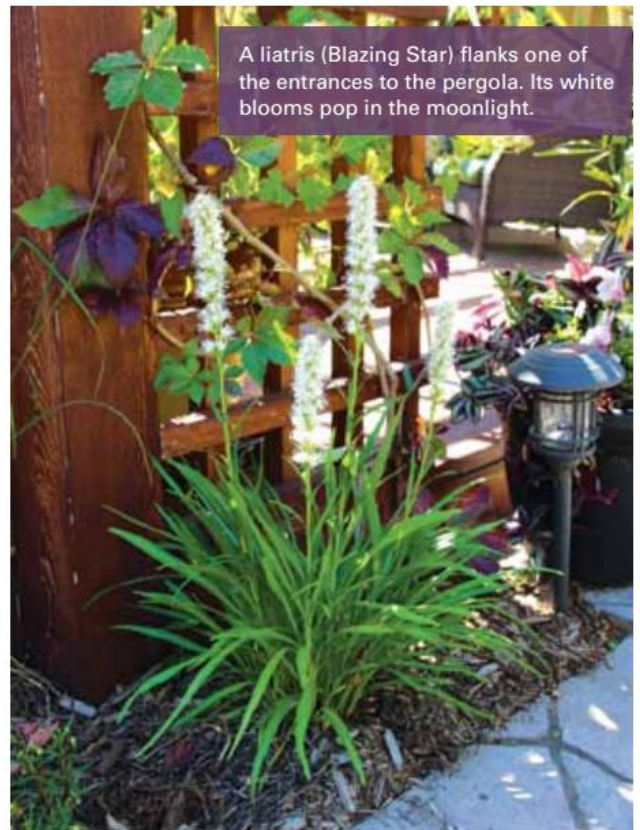
three months to complete. "We had the cedar delivered and we stained everything before we assembled it," says Megan. "And I would be quite happy to never stain anything again for the rest of my life," she says with a laugh. The extensive latticework that sheathes sections of the perimeter was particularly finicky.

"I used to work a one-and-one rotation, so when I got home I could get a lot of it done," says Darin. A teacher at the time, Megan had summers off so they were both able to contribute considerable sweat equity to the space. Their fathers also lent a hand with the deck, fence and pergola.

"Everything from the hardscaping, to the design, to the plant selection, we've all done that pretty much together," says Megan. "Darin has been the brainchild of the hardscaping, like the fence,



Megan and Darin make grape juice and fruit leather from the grapes that grow on the vines on the east side of their yard.



A liatris (Blazing Star) flanks one of the entrances to the pergola. Its white blooms pop in the moonlight.



Darin grows peppers in pots on the sun-drenched top deck. Last summer, he grew 62 individual pepper plants.

the pergola and the deck." Megan constructed the raised beds, and drove the bobcat during the landscaping stage. "That was so much fun," she says. "I got to cross that off my bucket list."

Lessons Learned

Megan says one of the mistakes they made was the number of different plants they included at the outset. "It felt, at first, like the Noah's ark version of planting where you have two of everything," she says. Her focus now is on creating more cohesiveness and repetition. On the plus side, she says it's easy to find someone online who is happy to take a plant off their hands when they're ready to remove something.

Megan adds that the process of creating their garden has taught her that gardening isn't just about the plants. "It's also ➤

With the help of their fathers, it took the couple three months to build their cedar pergola.



about your more permanent structures, and I think you need to have those fairly well figured out before you try to do your actual gardening. We've had to take out hardscaping in previous properties, and it's so much better if you're well planned at the start."

Darin says he gleaned one of his favourite lessons in a gardening class: "If it doesn't bring you joy, just rip it out and start over with something else."

The Kitchen Garden

Megan and Darin have grown a wide variety of vegetables and herbs, including beets, broccoli, onions, corn, cauliflower, fennel, lemon verbena and cumin, but Darin's focus is peppers. He's lost track of how many varieties he's



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Megan and Darin have grown a wide variety of vegetables and herbs in their raised beds, including beets, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes, onions and lemon verbena.



Darin makes paprika powder with his Alma paprika peppers shown here.

grown since they started their garden.

"The main ones are cayenne, jalapenos, habaneros...I was doing a lot of different kinds of red bell peppers, but I've switched to mainly Alma paprika, and I make paprika powder out of that," he says. The process involves drying the peppers out with a dehydrator, then finely grinding them with a blade grinder and putting it through a sieve. He also makes smoked paprika and cayenne pepper, which involves putting the peppers in his smoker before the dehydration process. "I'd say we eat about 10 per cent of the peppers fresh—the rest gets processed into different things," says Megan.

They use the paprika as a base for other seasonings, such as chili powder and

rub. Most of the peppers grow in pots on their back deck, and last summer they grew 62 individual pepper plants.

They also make their own onion powder, dehydrated shallot flakes, and infuse oils with dehydrated onions, shallots and peppers.

Take it Vertical

Megan and Darin's favourite element in their garden is the pergola. "I like being surrounded by tons of vegetation...and hanging out in the pergola just being surrounded by nature," says Darin. Megan adds that the mixed border around the pergola further enhances the space. "We've found plants that seem to work really well in a shady, damp spot. The ligularia (Bottle Rocket) does really well there and it gives it a tropical, almost ➤

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Jurassic kind of feeling.”

They both say creating vertical interest has been key to creating that cozy, surrounded by nature atmosphere. “Consider not just what is going in the beds, but what is growing ‘up’ too—trees and vines and things like that,” says Megan.

Dancing in the Moonlight

On weekend evenings, they often have friends over, including one friend who DJs. He brings his equipment to play music, “and we’ll have a dance party out there,” says Megan.

On quieter nights, they’ll bring blankets outside. “The warmth of the fire, our space heater, and the blankets make it cozy even when temperatures drop.”

A Feast for the Senses

After a long day of working in the garden, they like to relax in the pergola with a glass of wine, enjoying the fruits of their labour: the lush Virginia creeper enveloping the pergola, grapevines “bursting with grapes, and the vegetables ripening in the raised beds,” says Megan.

The evening primrose reveals its yellow blooms at night before closing up again in the morning. The leaves



The garden is 100% organic. “We have even started using green manure around the veggies as fertilizer,” says Megan.



Megan and Darin added vertical interest throughout their yard, with grape vines growing along the fence, and Virginia creeper that climbs the pergola’s latticework.

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rustle in the wind, bees buzz among the flowers (they love the hyssop, says Megan). The dwarf lilacs “give off an amazing scent both day and night, and if we have watered recently, the smell of our cedar mulch is incredible,” Megan adds. “Being in a new neighborhood on the edge of the city, traffic is minimal so at times we can hear trains and even coyotes.”

It’s an enchanting spot to contemplate their next steps. “My next challenge is incorporating plants that can potentially be used for medicinal or healing purposes,” says Megan, “and I think Darin’s is to continue to grow peppers.” (H)

Julie Barnes



Spiky yellow ligularia blooms add colour and give the pergola a “surrounded by nature” feel.



Instead of cutting their plants back in the fall, Megan and Darin wait until spring to clean up their garden. The spent plants provide a winter habitat for beneficial insects, and add nutrients back into the soil.



MODERNIZING NOSTALGIA

BUYING AND RENOVATING A CHILDHOOD HOME



KARIN MELBERG SCHWIER



LILLIAN LANE

Sometimes adult children, for a variety of reasons, come back home to roost, upending their parents' empty-nester status. But there are others who come back to claim the roost as their own when the parents move on, seizing the opportunity to live their

adult lives in the rooms they occupied in childhood. One such remigrant, Colleen Shalley, embraced the Lakeview home she knew in her formative years and, together with husband Matt, decided to make it a place to create new memories.

The 1600 sq. ft. two-storey, three bedroom, two-and-a-half bath, was built in the 1980s and was home to Colleen's family. Her parents Belinda and Trevor, who had corporate jobs, and her younger sister Erica who was only a year when the family

bought the Wakaw Crescent house. It was Colleen's sanctuary from the age of five until she left at 18.

Making the Move Back

Newlyweds Colleen and Matt lived in Warman and wanted to move back




to Saskatoon. When her grandfather passed away in 2018, his condo was left to Colleen's parents.

"Mom and Dad were close to retirement, so they made the decision to move to the condo," Colleen explains. "It was the perfect

opportunity for us to live in a well established area in my childhood home!"

Belinda and Trevor were thrilled that the house would stay in the family. They were "supportive and loved the idea, and they gave us a pretty good ➤




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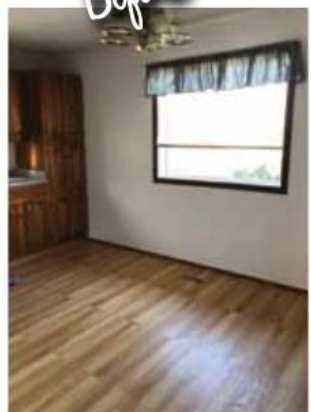



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purchase price." To top that off, Colleen's parents also they rolled up their sleeves and got involved in the demolition stage of the reno.

Memories Made at Home

To realize Colleen and Matt's renovation dream, history had to make some room for updates and style

makeovers. There were many stories told during the ripping up and tearing down in places where childhood memories lingered.

"Christmas was always a magical time," Colleen remembers. "Coming down the stairs and seeing the tree all lit up with gifts under it on Christmas morning was

so special! The tree always went up December 1st and it was my job to put the angel on top." Colleen owns Infinity Management (event planning and decorating), so maybe a bit of that décor acumen took hold at an early age. The tree's place of honour is now the home office.

There was always an

"epic Easter egg hunt" and the sisters ran downstairs to see which eggs the cat, already having unhidden several, was batting around. One Ukrainian Easter egg project was memorable, complete with melted wax, "I almost caught the house on fire," Colleen recalls. The kitchen was the epicentre



Colleen, at centre, with parents Belinda and Trevor, and sister Erica, circa 2002.





of family dinner together every night, birthdays and other occasions, holiday gatherings, and countless hours for the sisters spent on craft “masterpieces like ornaments made out of pumpkin seeds.” The kitchen area underwent the biggest change during the renovation.

Reclaiming Spaces

“The house was built in the 80’s, so it was pretty dated,” says Colleen. “My parents were so excited about it. We started demo in May 2019 and then hired the construction company Go2Guys to complete a full main floor interior renovation.” Since Colleen and Matt, a human resources manager, both work fulltime, they knew they couldn’t tackle this alone.

The project included the entrance, living room, laundry area/mudroom, kitchen/dining area and office. The full main floor renovation



included removing walls, almost down to the studs. At the front entrance, a closet was removed for more open space, and a 1980s sitting room was turned into the office.

“In the old homey kitchen, we tore out a wall. We created a beautiful open concept gourmet kitchen, something we’d always wanted.” The formal dining room, also a 1980s holdover, was claimed as more kitchen space and open dining area.

The main floor ➤





laundry lost a wall or two, and also turned into an open concept area with a mudroom. A main floor bathroom was also expanded and fully renovated.

The living room got a refreshed look. On Saturdays, the sisters would run to the corner store for bingo cards and dabbers. It was in this room they would park themselves to play along with the Kinsmen Club TV bingo. In this room, the original wood-burning fireplace, though no longer functional, was saved, along with memories of curling up with a blanket in front of the fire to watch VHS movies.

Making New Memories

"As a business owner, using other local vendors was an important factor in this renovation," Colleen insists. "When you understand and appreciate the benefits of shopping local, it was a no brainer."

As for now, is a renovation ever really done? The upstairs is next on the list. The basement is still an oldie goldie, with a spare bedroom and storage.

"My sister and I spent countless hours down there playing 'school,' says Colleen. "I mean, we would come home from school and play 'school.' We had everything



a full classroom would, like desks, a teacher desk, stuffed toys as students. We also played 'store' down there. We had a vintage bar we used as a till, complete with cash register, shelving with products available for purchase. You name it, we had it available in our store. We had an air hockey table downstairs, too," Colleen remembers. "Come to think of it, there were many occasions I beat my dad."

Making an Old Home a New Home

Colleen and Matt wanted to create an open-concept home, one easy to entertain in, but still comfortable and 'homey.' The couple did salvage and incorporate a few original pieces into the renovation, including the fireplace and mantel. A few

interior doors were hung in the new kitchen pantry. Despite the sisters' penchant for crafts and a "massive Barbie collection," no traces were found.

Even though many memories were fondly remembered during the reno, Colleen approached it as a way to create a new life for her own family. So far, the Shalley household consists of Colleen and Matt, dogs Buddy, Cleo, Felix and long-suffering cat Pepper, but now there's a lot more room to expand.

"I am not a very sentimental person," she says. "I was just excited about the change and creating a home where my husband and I and future family can make our own memories." (H)

Karin Melberg Schwier



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COTTAGE LIFE AT HOME

LAKE-LIKE LIVING IN THE BACKYARD



KARIN MELBERG SCHWIER



DAWN STRANDEN

On July 20, 1983, ever-romantic husband Brian Stranden surprised his wife Pat with a treasure map for their ninth anniversary. On a page from the *Star Phoenix*, he'd written 'diner out' and circled an ad for the new James Bond movie, *Octopussy*. A little picture of a swimming pool taped on the bottom caught her eye. Pat quickly realized their

barren lot on a Confederation Park cul-de-sac was about to undergo a massive tranquility makeover.

Lake Living

"We built the house new in 1974. It was close to where Pat worked at Intercon, and the lot was a huge pie-shape, 40 feet across the front, 100 across the back. Just grass and a fence. Pat liked the

grass," says Brian. "But one day I said 'enough mowing!' We didn't have a cabin or a boat so we decided to make this backyard our lakeside holiday spot."

Lakeside living means water. So in came the heavy equipment to dig a 16 x 32-foot sized hole for a pool. Brian lays out his photo albums documenting the transformation that year.

And what's a Saskatchewan lakeside retreat without spruce and pine trees?

"We had a couple, but with such a big lot, we went up north of Prince Albert for more," says Pat. "We found quite a few. Some didn't make it, but the ones we have now have done really well. In fact, we don't have any deciduous trees. Just evergreens so we don't ➤

get leaves in the pool. We admire the fall colours in our neighbours' yards."

Today, the backyard features 20 evergreens, including both Brandon and Siberian cedars that offer privacy and windbreak, and globe cedars. Three fountains attract attention, and birdsong is constant year around.

If You Build It, They Will Come

Family gatherings are common and with so much room to spread out, up to 75 have been happily entertained. The only rule, says Brian, is "bring your

own towel!" In fact, the pool—definitely not the albatross many homeowners fear, at least not for the Strandens—has been the focal point of friends and family get-togethers for nearly 40 years.

"It wasn't particularly common in this area of town," says Dawn, born a year after the pool install. Her brother Mark was born in 1985. "We grew up with it, but friends would get super excited when they found out we had a pool."

A cedar gazebo built in 1985 eventually failed 28 years later, opening a new space

Pat and Brian Stranden at home in Confederation.



Photo Credit: Amanda Poulin

Grandma and Grandpa with the youngest grandkids.





Daughter Dawn helped her parents design various relaxation, eating and entertainment areas.

for a wood-burning firepit for roasting marshmallows and hotdogs. Decking at different angles creates interest and some dark stained transition boards break up long sightlines.

Two spruce grew so

vigorously they eventually blocked out much of the day's sunlight. Daughter Dawn, a photographer who has designed much of their evolving backyard retreat, convinced her parents to remove one 40-footer. In the

space where the tree once stood, more decking was built for better seating and a propane firetable.

Two years ago on the last remaining area of grass, a large deck was built around the trunks of remaining trees

to better integrate them into the living space. As family grew, a small eating area was moved and outfitted with a dining table with elbowroom and ten chairs. Today, a cedar pergola is a favourite spot and, at night, strings ➤

Lighting provides a peaceful
ambiance in the evening.



of twinkling lights offer a
tranquil entertaining space.

A Family Mecca

"We've always been a close family, but this backyard is a special place that brings everyone together. It's not just the pool. Even if we aren't swimming, it feels like we're just spending time at the lake," says Dawn, who lives in Martensville. "There's something special about their backyard," she says. "It's an occasion every time we're here. That's true even when it's a spontaneous get-together. Just being out is calming and peaceful."

When it's just the two of them, Pat, who ironically doesn't much care for swimming, says it's her favourite place to be when she wants some quiet time. "I

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pretend I'm at the lake. I take my coffee out and sit and survey the area. Then I get up and sit somewhere else and look around," she says.

"You know, a pool isn't for everyone," says Brian, who

is semi-retired. "Sometimes real estate agents will say it's a bad investment. Some people who buy a property with a pool fill it in. Me, I like to look after it. It's always a family occasion when we

open it up in the spring and pull the cover off. Sometimes there are already a few ducks there on the cover."

In between the opening and Labour Day closing, the pool is a drawing card for

Kim, Dawn, sons-in-law Mike and Brett, and son Mark. The older grandchildren—Andrew, Shaun and Gordie—have spent already many happy hours there. For Kim, seeing the family come ➤



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Photo Credit: Amanda Poulin



The Stranden clan.

together as her own children enjoy the backyard, just as she and her siblings did, is a pleasure. This summer, Dawn will introduce her one-year-old Jane to the Stranden 'lake.' She remembers synchronized swimming classes. Kim and Dawn got free lessons since it was their pool. Brother Mark recalls swimming during rainstorms, and building forts with his sisters in the pool. "Lots of times we'd take air mattresses out," says Dawn, "and pretend we were camping at the lake."

More Convenient Than a Cabin

For many cabin owners, the love sets in once they arrive, but they lament the preparations and commute. Opening and closing a cabin, and maintaining a property at a distance can be problematic.

"One of the nice things about this backyard is that we aren't packing for a trip to the cabin, unpacking, then packing up to come home. Everyone comes over. The

kids play. We just barbeque and sit in the hot tub at the end of the day," says Pat.

Maximizing the Saskatchewan Summer

"Anyone who lives in Saskatchewan knows we make the most of outdoor time," says Dawn. "Mom and Dad are outside all summer. When we put the pergola in, we hung patio lights to enjoy in the evenings. You make the most of a special environment like this."

For their 45th anniversary, Kim, Mark and Dawn presented their parents with a wrought iron sign. It features the family name, 'est. 1974,' and a 'welcome to our lake' greeting.

"We built this place for us," Brian insists. "It's what we enjoy, both Pat and I, and the family. We didn't do it for re-sale. Anyway, we've been here 46 years and don't plan on going anywhere."

Except maybe out to the back yard. (i)

Karin Melberg Schwier

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Located on 400 acres of prairie paradise, during the summers at Crossmount various kinds of flowers show their lovely faces one at a time until there is a bounty of beauty and colour. With the open skies of the prairies one can enjoy a multitude of birdsong during the day and at night, to quote lyrics by The Tragically Hip, "the constellations reveal themselves one star at a time".

Crossmount has maintained safety protocols over the past months to keep residents, employees and visitors safe. Moving forward we will continue to do the same, but are still available to answer questions or provide further information about our independent living options. You can contact us by email at hheimann@crossmountvillage.ca, by phone at 306-374-9890 or via our website.

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Bohemian waxwings are most commonly seen in the Saskatoon area in winter and early spring. They often come in large numbers to feed on berries left on trees.

ATTRACTING BEAUTIFUL BIRDS

MAKING YOUR BACKYARD BIRD FRIENDLY



ROBIN AND ARLENE KARPAN

One of the great pleasures of summer is watching birds enjoying our yards. A robin tends her brood in a concealed nest in a crabapple tree. Cedar waxwings feed on chokecherries. Chipping sparrows flit through the garden looking for tasty insects. A bonus is that many

of our feathered friends love to devour those pesky mosquitoes.

The Saskatoon Nature Society has documented 331 bird species in the Saskatoon area. While some are rarities and others only show up during migration, that still leaves a lot of possibilities.

Common birds we might find in our yards include robins, sparrows, blackbirds, chickadees, nuthatches, blue jays, woodpeckers, finches, wrens, and waxwings, to name only a few. Many migratory species also pass through Saskatoon on the way to and from nesting

grounds farther north. If they like what they see in your yard, they might hang out for a while to rest and refuel.

What do Birds Need?

There is a lot we can do to make our yards bird friendly by providing food, water, shelter and nesting



American goldfinch can often be enticed by tube feeders.



Black-capped chickadees are among the common birds at backyard feeders.



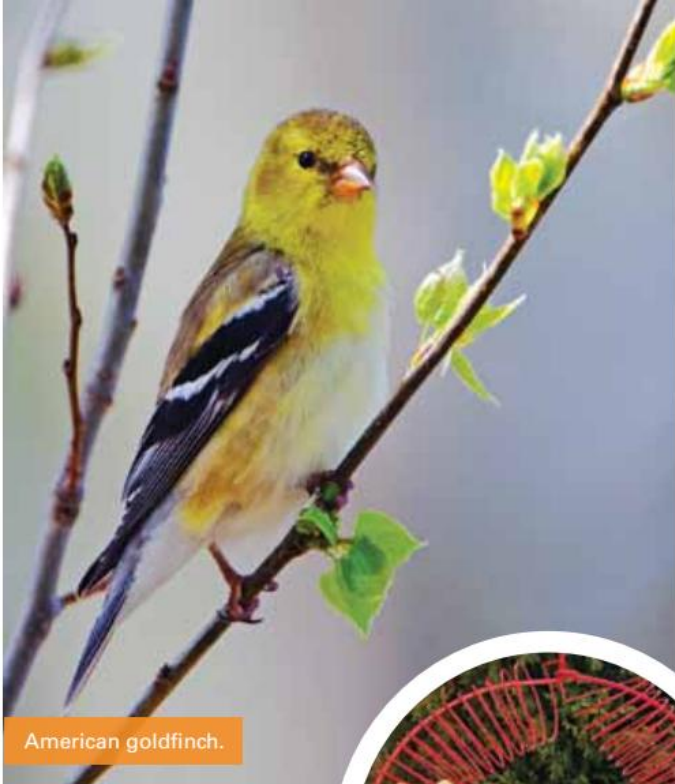
The American robin is one of our most recognizable songbirds. It is common for them to nest in backyards, especially in trees with lots of foliage for cover. Here one has found a tasty earthworm.

sites. To attract a wide array of birds, our yards need a lot of diversity since not all species look for the same thing. Juncos and doves feed on the ground, while most woodpeckers find insects in trees. Fruit attracts robins and waxwings. Still others catch prey on the fly.

A birdbath or fountain provides water for drinking and bathing. You can buy one, or design your own from simple things you might have on hand. Just attach a rimmed tray on top of overturned clay pots. Install it in a place where cats and hawks can't launch an ambush. ➤



Baltimore oriole.



American goldfinch.

Birds need a safe shelter to take a breather, to avoid predators, or to ride out inclement weather. They make use of evergreens, branchy hedges, hollow logs, or even leaf litter under larger trees.

Almost anywhere with cover might be used for nesting sites such as cedar boughs, hedges, or evergreens. Nesting boxes can supplement natural sites; for example, house wrens readily take to them. The size of your yard often determines which type of nesting box is feasible.

You can buy ready-made birdhouses or make your own. Numerous online sources have detailed building instructions complete with the dimensions needed for different species. Be sure to clean them thoroughly at the end of the nesting season since bacteria, mites, and insects can linger in nesting material.

Short- and Long-Term Strategies

The easiest way to start attracting birds to your yard is to put up feeders. To navigate the world of

White Admiral Butterfly. Making a backyard attractive to birds usually makes it attractive to butterflies as well.



Highbush cranberry. Planting berry bushes will help to attract birds to your yard.



Many native wildflowers such as goldenrod are attractive to birds.



Ruby-throated hummingbird (female) near feeder.



Blue jays are among our most colourful birds. They can often be enticed with peanuts.



HELPFUL BIRDER RESOURCES

Saskatoon Nature Society: resources on local wildlife including the Saskatoon Area Birds Seasonal Checklist: saskatoonnature.org

Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation Saskatoon: excellent information on bird strikes and windows: livingskywildliferehabilitation.org

Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop: information on birdseed, feeders, and ways to attract birds: saskatoon.wbu.com

Canadian Wildlife Federation: lots of information on backyard habitat and building nesting boxes: cwf-fcf.org

Nature Canada: discover, enjoy and defend nature: naturecanada.ca



feeders and various types of food there are some great resources in the sidebar of this article. For example, suet feeders attract woodpeckers and nuthatches, finches take readily to tube feeders, and hummingbirds need nectar feeders.

Incorporate annual plants that attract birds and butterflies to your garden. Some favourites include petunias, sunflowers, snapdragons, zinnias, marigolds, and nasturtiums.

Nectar-producing plants, especially ones with red flowers, appeal to hummingbirds.

Long-term strategies include planting fruit-bearing trees such as saskatoon, chokecherry or high-bush cranberry, or native varieties of dogwood. Install a trellis with vines to provide shade for birds. Plant perennials of different colors and heights such as columbine, coneflower, aster, or delphinium. Nurseries can

help you decide which native species would fit best into your backyard landscape.

Mess Around a Bit

Highly manicured yards with not a twig or blade of grass out of place are not what birds look for. In nature, things can get a bit messy with leaf litter, uncut grass, or fallen branches lying about. While urban yards can't replace nature, we can at least mimic some conditions that birds ➤



Ruby-throated hummingbird.



prefer. It might be as simple as not being overly fastidious in tidying up.

After you prune trees, leave a little pile of branches where it won't be disturbed. Insects and worms attracted to the debris are appealing food sources for foraging birds, and the litter provides shelter and protection. A debris pile becomes prime real estate in winter since it catches snow and gives birds a place to burrow for shelter.

In spring, waves of migratory birds such as juncos that like eating on the ground quickly clean up spilled food that has fallen from a feeder during the winter. And in fall and winter, seed heads on garden flowers can also be a welcome food source.

A Few Cautions

Birds are susceptible to pesticide use. They might ingest pesticide granules thinking that they're food, or they might consume insects killed by pesticides. So before poisoning those dandelions, think about all the organisms that could be affected. If you absolutely can't tolerate something in your yard, consider organic control products or dig it out by hand.

Homeowners can greatly assist birds by controlling their cats. A study by Environment Canada scientists estimated that between 100 and 350 million birds in Canada are killed per year by cats.

Twenty-five million birds per year in Canada die from colliding with windows. One

way to mitigate this in your yard is to place feeders either well away from windows, or within a half metre. Birds taking off from feeders next to a window don't have enough speed for a damaging collision. It also helps to put decals or other items on the window so birds don't mistake it for an open space, and to remove houseplants from problem windows.

Bird strikes can happen anytime and with a variety of species. In our yard the biggest problem is when Bohemian waxwings arrive in late winter or early spring to gorge on leftover partially fermented berries on the trees. Tipsy birds end up flying under the influence and are more likely to misjudge distances and head for a window. When

Rose-breasted grosbeak. They generally nest farther north, so most of the birds we see in Saskatoon are migrating through.



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House finch feeding time.



American goldfinch.

they're around, we have to close the blinds on windows facing the tree.

While numerous websites contain information on attracting and feeding birds, be sure to look for credible sources that pertain to conditions in our part of the country. (H)

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-SASKATOON- ***Backyard Birding Reference Map***



House wren



American
goldfinch



Red-winged
blackbird



Blue jay



Baltimore
oriole



House finch



Black-capped
chickadee



Purple finch



Dark-eyed junco



Robin



Rose-breasted
grosbeak



Ruby-throated
hummingbird



Hairy
woodpecker



Northern
flicker



House sparrow



Chipping
sparrow



Mourning dove



Bohemian
waxwing



Cedar
waxwing



Red-breasted
nuthatch



Yellow warbler



COMPOST COACHING

TURNING YOUR TRASH INTO TREASURE



JULIE BARNES

When Lisa Howse began working as a compost coach, she didn't expect she'd be playing the role of couple's counsellor, but that's how the job plays out sometimes. At least, that's how it did when I invited her to meet with my husband, our compost bin, and me, last summer.

Lisa is a compost education coordinator with the Saskatchewan

Waste Reduction Council, a non-profit contracted by the City of Saskatoon to run the compost coaching program. She makes free home visits to offer composting advice—whether it's for a backyard bin, Bokashi or vermicomposting (see sidebar).

It turns out we're not the only couple who clash about the correct way to compost. Luckily, her usual response

to infighting is "you're both right." Although there are general rules to composting, we shouldn't sweat the small stuff, she says. "If you do or do not cut up your fruit peels before they go into the compost bin, it's not a life-or-death situation."

Breaking Down the Basics

With backyard compost bins, Lisa gets a lot of

questions about "green and brown" materials—what they are, and what's the right mix. "Sometimes it's better, instead of 'greens and browns,' to call the categories 'fresh materials and old stuff,'" she says. Green, fresh materials add nitrogen to the mix, while brown, old materials add carbon.

"Green materials are anything that will rot quickly

if you had a pile of it. It's your food waste and green plants," Lisa says. The brown materials are dead things, like leaves or straw.

As for the right balance of the two, Lisa says it's 50-50, but it's not an exact science. "The actual ratio is two-fifths green and three-fifths brown, but that's harder for people to remember and it doesn't make a noticeable difference in a backyard bin," she says. "People who are making compost on a massive scale to package and sell are very concerned the specific carbon and nitrogen ratios, so they'll use exact percentages, but for home, 50-50 is fine."

Easy Fixes

A common problem owners of outdoor bins encounter is that the materials aren't breaking down, says Lisa. "When that happens, the case is often that they haven't ever added water to their bin because they didn't know it was necessary," she says. Keeping it consistently damp will turn things around. "You want it damp all the way through, like a wrung-out washcloth."

Lisa also fields questions about questionable smells. When this happens, the compost has typically gone anaerobic (oxygen-starved). The fix is to stir in some brown materials. "So, we talk to them about adding leaves, woodchips, straw and paper. We mix them in and the smell goes away within a handful of days."

Regular stirring is also key to a healthy compost bin. It helps break up the materials and adds fresh air, which allows the decomposition microbes to do their work. Stirring every two weeks is great, and every week is even better, Lisa says. ➤



Nine months after our August 2019 compost coaching session with Lisa Howse, we've created a nutrient-rich compost to use throughout our garden.

Photo Credit (below): Lisa Howse



The City of Saskatoon provides a \$20 rebate on the purchase of a home compost bin. Or, you can choose to build your own and receive a \$20 rebate on the materials purchased to DIY.



Adding compost to your garden helps plants build resilience in difficult conditions. "It helps plants get through droughts more easily, and it will help loosen up clay soils," Lisa says.



Bokashi composting is a two-step process. Unlike other forms of composting, you can add dairy, meat and bones to a Bokashi compost bin.



Vermicomposting (making compost with red wiggler worms) is a great way to create compost if you don't have space for an outdoor bin.

Photo Credits: Lisa Howse

COMPOST LINGO

If you don't have space for an outdoor compost bin, vermicomposting and Bokashi composting are excellent alternatives. Trench composting requires a garden and is the easiest form of composting.

Vermicomposting is the process of feeding food waste to red-wiggler earthworms. It's as simple as taking a plastic storage tub, drilling holes in the lid, adding some shredded newspaper for bedding, some soil, and the worms, which you can buy locally. They feed on plant-based food waste and eggshells and can eat up to their full body weight in a day.

Bokashi composting is a two-step process. Unlike other forms of composting, you can add meat and dairy, in addition to food waste. "It starts by fermenting food waste in a tightly sealed container, like a 5-gallon bucket," says Lisa. You'll need some untreated sawdust at bottom of the bucket to absorb excess liquids. Every other day, you can add your kitchen waste, adding a handful of Bokashi

bran over every 1-inch layer of kitchen scraps. Once your bucket is full, set it aside for two weeks (you'll want a second bucket so you can continue composting while the first bin ferments). After two weeks, the contents will smell sour. They can then be added to your outdoor compost to break down further, or added directly to your garden via trench composting.

Trench composting is exactly as it sounds. Food scraps are buried directly in the garden under 6-8 inches of soil. As little as two inches is fine if you're not worried about animals digging in your garden. Only green materials should be buried, while brown materials (like leaves) can be spread on top as mulch.

To book a compost coaching session, or to learn more about how to compost, including Bokashi and vermicomposting, and where to buy red-wiggler earthworms in Saskatoon, visit www.swrc.ca/compost



Lisa (with Josh right) gave our compost an A-grade. The only issue was that she spotted a slug inside the bin—which is indicative of over-watering.



Stirring and regular watering keep mice away. Dry, undisturbed compost creates a comfortable home for them. Damp, regularly mixed bins aren't nearly as enticing.

Photo Credit: Lisa Howse

Common Misconceptions

There are a lot of misconceptions about what materials you can and can't put in a compost bin, and Lisa has heard them all. Contrary to popular belief, you can add pine needles, citrus peels or even whole lemons to your outdoor bin. "There are some things that rot slower than others but it will all break down eventually," she says.

If a plant is poisonous to eat, such as the leaves of rhubarb, it's still safe to add it to your bin. "It's not a permanent, persistent poison that can make it all the way through the decomposition process," says Lisa.

What you shouldn't add are compostable plastics. That "compostable" label can be misleading because a backyard bin doesn't generate the hot temperatures required to break the material down. Those conditions are typically found only in industrial compost settings.

Brimming with Benefits

One of the key environmental benefits of composting is diverting waste from our landfills. When food and yard waste end up in a landfill, they break down in an anaerobic environment, says Lisa.

"When there's not enough air, food and yard waste rot in a way that makes greenhouse gases," with methane being the main culprit.

By composting, you're preventing the creation of these greenhouse gases, and "you'll even sequester some carbon in the finished product because using compost (in the garden) helps draw carbon down into the soil."

But it's not just about waste diversion, says Lisa. "The benefits that it gives to the soil and all of the things living in the soil—from the tiniest little bacteria, to the big earthworm and all the plants growing out of it—is just massive."

With Lisa's help, we'll have a healthy garden this year, and maybe a healthier relationship. For the record, I wanted us to crush our eggshells and cut up banana peels before adding them to the bin. My husband Josh didn't.

"To be clear, cutting things up in smaller pieces does make compost break down faster," Lisa said, "it's just that we don't have to do everything to the perfect standard all the time."

"Did you get that on tape that I was right?" Josh asked me.

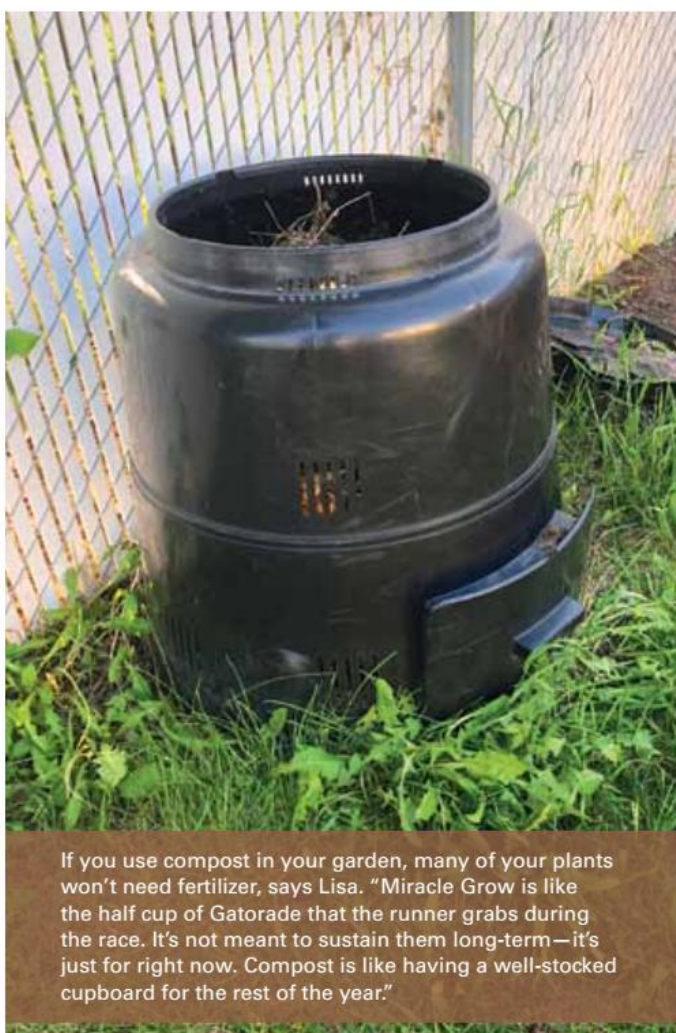
"We're both right," I said.

"It's more like I'm the rightest," Josh countered.

"Both methods will work, it's just that mine will break things down faster," I added.

I've always loved getting the last word. (f)

Julie Barnes



If you use compost in your garden, many of your plants won't need fertilizer, says Lisa. "Miracle Grow is like the half cup of Gatorade that the runner grabs during the race. It's not meant to sustain them long-term—it's just for right now. Compost is like having a well-stocked cupboard for the rest of the year."

Photo Credit: Lisa Howse



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HOME FOOD: PLANT-BASED ISLAND INSPIRATION

 HILARY KLASSEN

A few weeks before the 2020 pandemic hit, when the planet was still breathing easy, a family vacation took me to the island of Oahu in Hawaii. Anticipation gave way to sweet reality as the plane descended, sparkling waters came into view, and I emerged into that wonderful semi-sticky tropical air.

Each morning, a power walk took me and my

‘wanna-be’ beach body out to greet the sun as it peeked over distant mountains. Paved pathways followed the contours of a series of beach lagoons. Each night extravagant sunsets painted the sky and reached through the lanai into our villa, as the sun hung low over the sea.

Some of our best food memories are made on vacation—experiences

that become stories worth salivating over later, retold with savvy embellishment. But with each vacation, a question also plagues me. Will the vacation ruin the diet, or will the diet ruin the vacation? My hope is to avoid all varieties of ruin. Like most people, I seek maximum enjoyment and minimal disruption.

Vacations are about a break

from the routine, and perhaps breaking some rules—diet rules, for example. I vacillate between feeling that I have too many rules and not enough. One thing is clear. I stay away from all-inclusives because my self-restraint is dubious. On this 11-day escape to paradise, with the voices of psychologists whispering in my ear about our relationship with ➤

food, I wondered, how would the search for healthy foods and the quest for indulgence balance out?

Local haunts awaited discovery. Several oceanside restaurants in easy walking distance offered pleasant al fresco dining. We could watch the sun's gradual slide into the ocean and the changing canvas of the sky. But the eatery that most captured our attention was a long block inland. Its support of local and organic farming, hand-crafted cocktails, craft beers, live music and soulful vibe felt right. It was there, surrounded by palm trees and the happy buzz of people unwinding, that a simple dish suited my moment and capped off the last night of my vacation. Avocado cucumber salad as a menu item didn't sound overly exciting—promising but also potentially risky.

As I waited with anticipation and mild trepidation for my dish to arrive, I pondered what brought me to that

choice. That moment had a lot built into it—years of learning to listen to my body, of sampling various diet regimens without becoming a diet-junkie, and more recently an interest in gut health and a move to gluten free. Having a sister who was recently diagnosed as

a celiac, and a mother who died early from colon cancer, I am more attuned to food as fuel and a source of healing.

I'd been hearing about the plant-based diet. According to Google, it was the No. 1 search in the diet category in 2019. Various iterations of plant-based burgers

were rolled out. Given all the noise about food out there these days, I'm pretty selective when it comes to food trends. But plant-based eating resonates with me and it's where I've been heading. I'm marginally interested in the burgers, but I'll keep eating meat as well. It just



AVOCADO CUCUMBER SALAD RECIPE

This delicious plant-based recipe is an individual serving size, in consideration of all those who are self-isolating alone during the coronavirus pandemic.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 whole avocado cut in medium-sized chunks
- 2 small mini cucumbers cut on the slant
- 1 roma tomato cut in chunks (or 2 small cocktail tomatoes)
- 2 tbsp chopped red onion
- 1 – 2 tbsp chopped fresh cilantro
- One half jalapeno pepper diced (optional —I left this out and didn't miss it)

CHILI-LIME VINAIGRETTE:

- Juice squeezed from one lime
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- Dash chili powder
- Dash salt
- 1 tsp lime zest
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh cilantro

Blend and stir gently into salad ingredients.



won't be the biggest thing on my plate, or sometimes, it won't be on the plate at all.

Speaking of plates, when my avocado cucumber salad arrived it exceeded expectations. No disappointment there. It was delectable! Besides avocado and cucumber, the

dish included tomato, maui onion, jalapeno and cilantro as ingredients. An exquisite savoury chili-lime vinaigrette provided flavour fusion. The salad was smashing paired with an authentic Mai Tai.

When I got home, I wasted no time attempting to recreate a version of ➤





this dish to enjoy whenever I like. With only five or six ingredients, this was not onerous. My version was equally delicious, with the same enjoyable slight-savoury quality.

I might wish for an avocado tree in my outdoor garden but in land-locked Saskatchewan, that would be like wishing for ocean views. Cucumbers and tomatoes are seasonally grown locally and will be found in my garden beds again this year. Using fresh garden vegetables takes this salad up a notch by putting a little summer in your mouth.

Avocados deliver some desirable 'good fats' that health gurus currently recommend to us. It turns out avocados are actually in the fruit category, but

nutritionally, they behave like a vegetable. The key to preparing them is at peak ripeness, when the fruit is a bit soft to the touch through the peel and the peel has started to darken from green to dark brown.

A friend of mine recently mentioned the challenge he was having with peeling avocados. If you're puzzling about that, you can borrow my method, which originates from a cooking class I took in Latin America on another vacation a while ago. Cut a ripe avocado in half lengthwise. Remove the pit if you're using the whole avocado. Then, using a tablespoon from a tableware set—not a measuring spoon—scoop around the entire inside of the avocado peel. It will

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come out clean every time.

I don't happen to have access to Maui onions, so I substituted red onion in this recipe. I enjoy cilantro, but it can provoke strong reactions in people. If you'd rather skip the cilantro, substitute with a suitable herb that makes your lips sing.

There are times when I reach for more complex multi-ingredient recipes. Part of the appeal of this recipe is its simplicity. It's a quick go-to option and a great healthy choice for any diet. Avocado Cucumber salad is fantastic as a one-dish lunch, or as a side on a dinner plate. And the fresh flavours may just transport you to an island paradise. (i)

Hilary Klassen



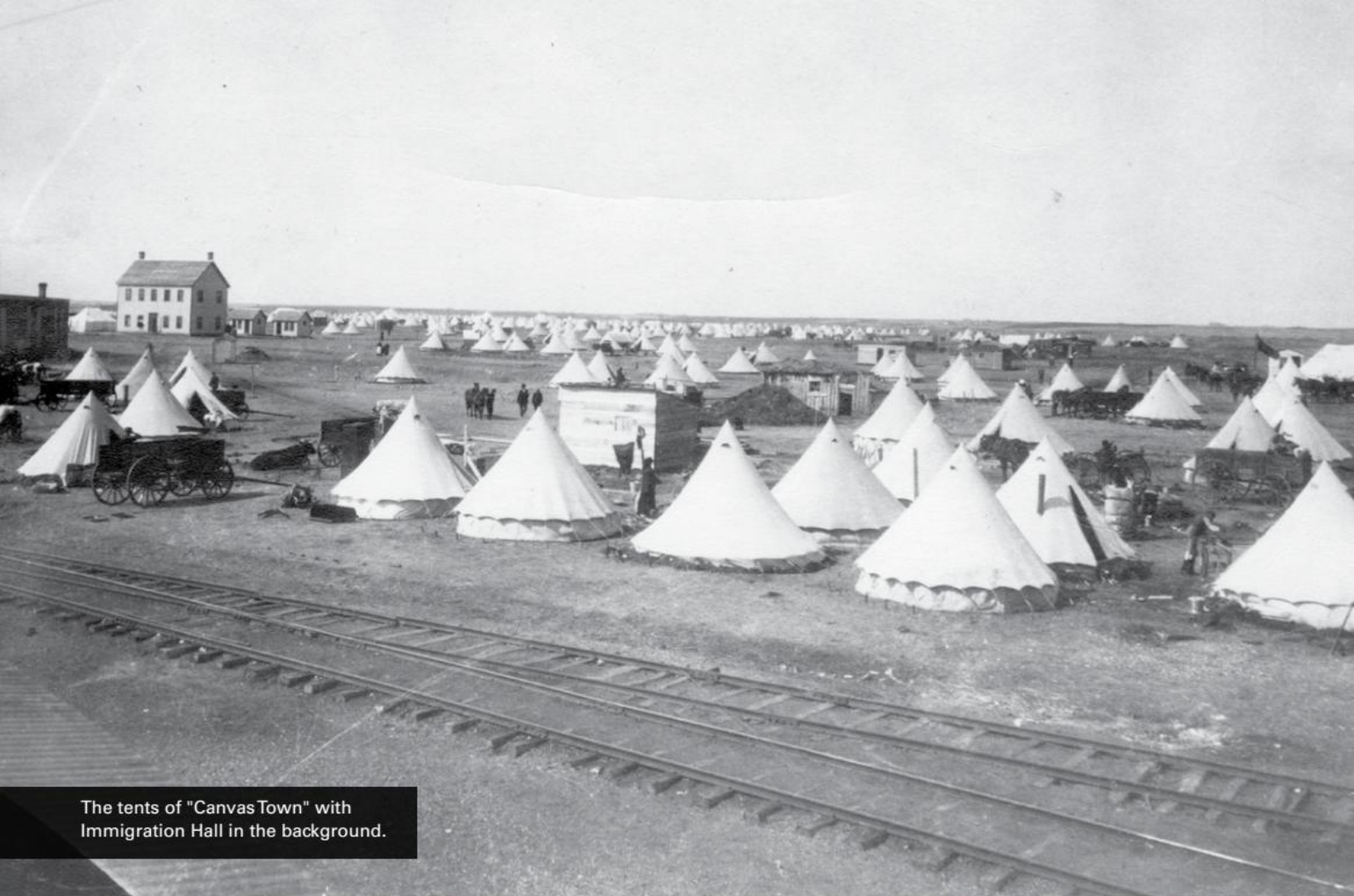
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The tents of "Canvas Town" with Immigration Hall in the background.

HOMEtown Reflections

 JEFF O'BRIEN

THE BARR COLONISTS SASKATOON'S FIRST TOURISTS

Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - LH 2780

Tourism has always been hugely important to Saskatoon, even in 1903, when the Barr Colonists—the first really big tour group to hit the City of Bridges—got off the train here on their way to Lloydminster. They only stayed here a few days, but Saskatoon would never be the same again.

In 1902, Isaac Barr, an Ontario-born, Anglican minister living in England, conceived of a scheme to lead a party from England to plant the flag of Britain at the very edge of the Empire, in the far Canadian west. Barr called his new colony "Britannia" and he spoke passionately of a land of empty spaces

and endless riches, where the government was giving away hundreds of acres for the price of a ten-dollar filing fee, but which was starting to fill with immigrants from America and Central Europe. "Let us take possession of Canada!" he thundered. "Let our cry be 'Canada for the British!'"

Trip West Plagued with Problems

Initially, Barr's plans were quite modest, intended for a small party composed of people "of some means and an inclination for farming," as one colonist later recalled. But the venture attracted huge interest and he was soon swamped with thousands of applications.

Rev. Isaac Barr holds the lines in a horse-drawn wagon.

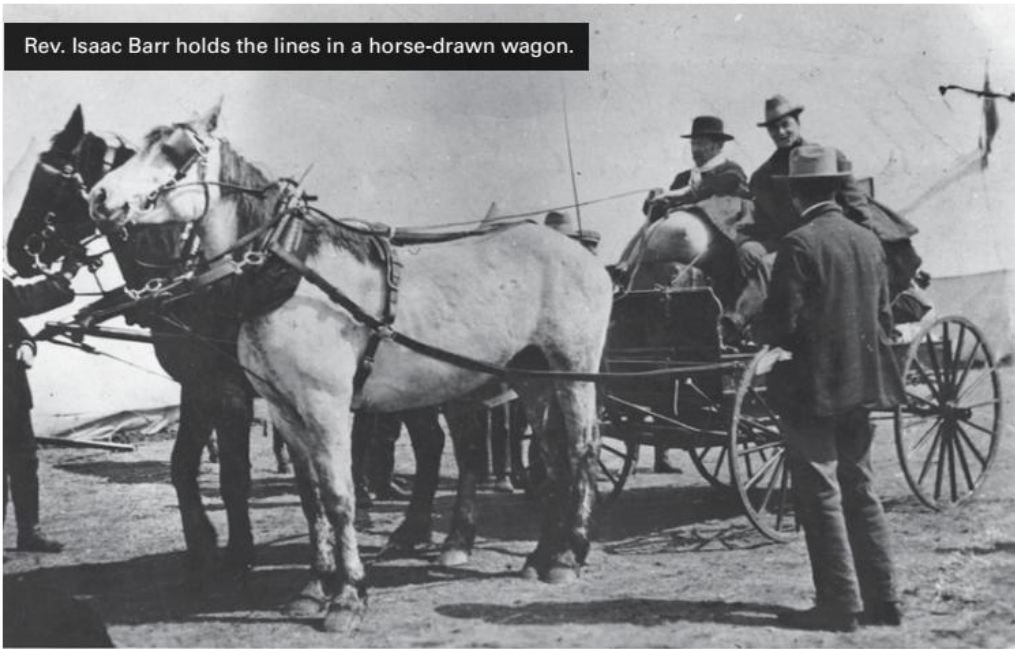


Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - LH 4807

They left England on March 31st, 1903. Barr had promised that every provision would be made to care for them both en route and when they arrived at their new

homes, including food, accommodation, hospitals and stores. Instead, things began to unravel almost right away.

The sea voyage was a

nightmare, with nearly 2,000 seasick people crammed into a ship originally outfitted for 550. For the 1,400 travelling steerage, it was crowded and filthy. There was no

privacy and the food was abysmal. Once in Canada, they were packed into noisy, uncomfortable, overcrowded trains for the long five-day trip to the end of the line, at Saskatoon.

Not Exactly the Answer to Prayers

They arrived here on the morning of April 17. It was the Promised Land, one young colonist would later recall: "When we get to Saskatoon! The words were on everybody's lips. All our troubles would be over, all our problems solved, once we arrived at that magic town." Sadly, Saskatoon did not live up to their expectations, being, instead little more than "a few houses huddled on one side of the [railway] track and a group of white tents, round and small, crouched on ➤

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Barr Colonists on board ship.
Rev. Isaac Barr seated.

Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - B 2099

the other side, and that was all."

Saskatoon in those days consisted of about 400 people clustered along the railway tracks in what is now the downtown, a handful in what is now Riversdale, and a few dozen more in the old Temperance Colony town site across the river in Nutana, which you could only get to by taking the ferry or by walking across on the railway bridge, a practice that had become more complicated since they'd instituted daily train service the month before.

Some Creature Comforts

But it was not without amenities. There were general stores, a tinsmith, a butcher, a baker, a harness maker, a doctor, flour and lumber mills, a barber, insurance and real estate salesman, a bank, a number of modest houses and even two small hotels (with saloons!) across the street from the railway station. There was even a hall for concerts and public meetings. Indeed, there was a great deal more to Saskatoon than there had been only a couple of years before. But to a trainload of English city folk, it didn't look like much of anything at all.

With their arrival, Saskatoon's population quadrupled. There were nowhere near accommodations enough for that many people. A few tents had been set up on the west side of the tracks near the Immigration Hall building. But most of their tents were stowed with their baggage, on a separate train that had yet to arrive. More cause for grumbling! When they did finally come,



Shaving tent in the Barr Colony camp.

Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - PH 2017-73-6



Panoramic view of First Avenue in Saskatoon, 1903.

Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - PH 2004-5



Saloon at the Windsor Hotel in Saskatoon, 1903.

Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - PH 96-80-16

“Canvas Town” as it was called, consisted of around 500-600 canvas tents pitched in an area from 21st Street to the river.

Primitive Conditions

Conditions in the camp were terribly primitive, especially for urban dwellers unused to camp life. Canvas enclosures with a hole in the ground served as toilets, open to the sky and the

chill spring breeze. Water was taken mostly from the river or from sloughs. The weather, as one might expect, varied from clear and chilly to cold and snowy, with a bit of rain thrown in for variety. It was as if Mother Nature was giving the new arrivals a taste of everything spring in Saskatchewan has to offer. Some of them were entranced by their temporary home, calling the ➤



First Ave at 20th Street, 1903.

Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - C 172

Looking west on 20th Street and north on Third Avenue, 1903.



experience "one lovely picnic." The rest were not so pleased.

Social distinctions in the camp mirrored those of home. The tents of the well-to-do were at the south end, closer to the river. "Here the men effect horsiness or sportiness of attire," reported the newspaper. Dressed

in "whipcord breeches or leather leggings with sombreros and ties that would wake the echoes, [they would] stroll around camp with setters and pointers at heel." The ladies, meanwhile, put on their afternoon dresses and called upon each other for tea as if they were still back home.

Struggling to Adjust

Green as grass and completely clueless about life on the prairies, the new arrivals were the source of endless amusement for the locals. The literature is full of stories about how ill prepared they were for their new lives, everything from how to chop wood to how

to hitch and unhitch their animals or drive a cart. One writer recalls that it was quite common to see "a team and wagon bolting through the camp, sometimes with no driver, upsetting tents and scattering terrified colonists in all directions."

For their part, and very much not to their credit,

Wagons of the Barr Colonists.



Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - LH 1584



Photo Credit: Local History Room - Saskatoon Public Library - C 180

some of the locals lined up to soak the newcomers for anything they could get, leading some of the colonists to nickname Saskatoon, "Sock-it-to-'em." This is a little ironic, since the greatest contribution of the Barr Colonists to Saskatoon was cash. Like tourists and travellers everywhere, they spent money like water. The local Board of Trade reported that the bank here cashed nearly \$300,000 in drafts that April, most of which went to buy horses, oxen and cattle, wagons and ploughs, tools, provisions and supplies of every kind. The Barr Colonists brought with them all the clothes, books and pianos they could carry. In Saskatoon, they bought the things they would need to survive.

Ten Days Changed History

The Colonists stayed here for ten days while they got ready to take the long trail to their new homes, 200 miles to the west. Some changed their minds and stayed behind. Others only made it partway before turning around and coming back. At some point, grumblings about Barr's

leadership that had begun on the sea voyage flared into open revolt and the colonists voted to depose him in favour of Rev. George Exton Lloyd. Which is why we call it Lloydminster, not Barrview.

But those things all happened somewhere else. Here in Saskatoon, history had been made. The money the colonists spent was a huge boost to the local economy. Just as important, if not as easily measured, was the free advertising Saskatoon got in English and Canadian newspapers, which had followed Barr's trek with great interest.

Partly as a result, Saskatoon would flower over the next few years, growing from a tiny village tucked into a sleepy corner along the South Saskatchewan River to become a major, modern, city. (H)

Jeff O'Brien

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LIVE FROM YOUR BACKYARD

HOW TO HOST A SUCCESSFUL HOUSE CONCERT

 JULIE BARNES

Photo Credit: Ryan Holowaty

A few years ago, my husband and I became jaded by the consumerism that coincides with Christmas. We decided that, as much as possible, we wanted to buy experiences as gifts instead of tangible items. One year, we bought my in-laws a cooking class with us at the Local Kitchen, and the next year we wanted to up our game.

We thought about their interests, and music came to mind. They're big fans of Regina-based musician Jeffery Straker, so we reached out to him to discuss the logistics of hosting a house concert with him at the helm.

Last summer, it all came together in our backyard—an unforgettable evening of

great music, good food and the company of close friends and family.

Jeffery's musical talents and his exceptional stage presence kept us all entertained, but his experience with house concerts also helped make us better hosts. Having performed over 100 house concerts—he's livened up

living rooms in Mexico, Ireland and the Netherlands, and every Canadian province—he knows a thing or two about what it takes to host a successful show from the comfort of your casa.

Be Your Own Impresario

If there's a solo artist or a duo you've seen perform at a smaller venue or festival,

don't be afraid to approach them after their show and ask if they play house concerts, says Jeffery. "It's actually really flattering for someone to approach a musician and say, 'I'd love you to do a house concert.'"

If you've heard a new singer on CBC or notice that an artist you like is going to be touring throughout Canada, it doesn't hurt to reach out. "Everyone has a website. Everyone has a Facebook page—just contact the artist directly," says Jeffery. "Don't be afraid."

Artists who perform at smaller venues like The Bassment are the same artists who tend to do house concerts, he says, so take a look at their line-ups for inspiration. However, most venues won't want the artist to book a house concert in the same city during the same trip because it will eat into their ticket sales.

"But a house concert on a subsequent trip—on their next tour—would be perfect."

Musical Numbers

Once you've found a musician, you'll have to discuss compensation. One of the perks of hosting a show in your home is that you don't necessarily have to foot the bill, because each guest pays at the door, or in advance (an average of \$20-\$25/person).


"What you're out is just the time to round up people, putting your chairs in a row and maybe making some snacks," says Jeffery. "That's oversimplifying it," he adds, "because it's a bit of a time commitment. But in terms of cash outlay there is a misconception that the host thinks they'll be out of pocket—they're typically not."

You'll need to round up at least 25 people or more, otherwise, "the ➤

Matt from Figs and Pigs Catering prepared appetizers and desserts for the evening.




Photo Credit: Bev Remai




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In our case, the concert we hosted was a gift to my in-laws, so we worked out a flat fee with Jeffery in advance so our guests didn't have to pay. This is typical when house concerts are planned as anniversary or birthday celebrations.

When hosts reach out to family, friends, co-workers and neighbours, it's usually quite easy to round up at least 25 people. Jeffery says at most of his concerts, guests pay at the door (another option is to have guests pay in advance). Unfortunately, this can translate to a few no-shows. To lessen the chances of this happening, your invitations need to be clear: when guests confirm their attendance, it's a commitment, just as if they bought tickets to a show at a local venue.

Setting the Tone

To set yourself up for success, your invitations also need to be clear about what the event is... and what it isn't. It's not a house party with a musician performing in the background—it's a listening event with an engaged audience. On the day of the event, lining up

Jeffery's view of the audience from his keyboard.

Selling merchandise helps musicians augment their income. If you're hosting a house concert, set aside some space in your home for the artist to set up a merch table.



Jeffery Straker answers several FAQs about hosting house concerts on his website: <https://www.jeffstraker.com>

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My aunt-in-law, Denise, met Jeffery for the first time during our house concert, although she had seen him perform before in Regina.



Photo Credit: Bev Remai

Jeffery brought along a musician friend, Danny Jones, to play double bass.



Photo Credit: Edna Kehrig

chairs to face the “stage” also helps set the tone. “Having people know in advance that it’s a listening event is so necessary,” says Jeffery.

For Jeffery’s shows, hosts usually ask guests to arrive at 7 p.m. The first set starts at 8 p.m., giving guests an hour to socialize, grab a snack, and get a drink. He performs two 45-minute sets with a break in between.

When the host introduces Jeffery to the guests before the performance starts, they’ll reiterate that it’s a listening event, just like if they were attending a concert at a local venue. They’ll also review the format for the evening, so guests understand they’ll have time to get another snack and refresh their drink between sets. ➤

The musician, Jeffery Straker, with Doug, Eric and Alice. Doug and Alice happen to be Jeffery’s uncle and aunt, and they are good friends with my in-laws.



Photo Credit: Jeffery Straker



Lining up seating to face the stage helps set the tone for the evening and is a visual reminder that guests are attending a listening event, not a house party with a musician performing in the background.

Photo Credit: Jeffery Straker



Photo Credit: Ryan Holowaty

Orchestrating Seating, Food and Accommodation

Most of us don't own 25+ chairs, and it's okay to improvise with cushions and outdoor furniture. It's also acceptable to ask your guests to BYOC, says Jeffery. "It's that kind of grass-rootsy that it's totally normal."

In fact, sharing is quite common at domestic gigs. Often, hosts will ask their guests to bring a dish to share, and/or to BYOB—it takes a lot of pressure of the host to have everyone pitch in potluck-style.

It's also common for the host to share their home with the artist if they've travelled outside their home city for the show. Having travelled from Regina, Jeffery stayed in our spare bedroom overnight and had breakfast with us the next morning before heading back home.

The Gift of Music

Considering the great distances between Canadian cities, house concerts are an opportune way for touring musicians to fill out their schedules and augment their income. They also provide an opportunity for artists to grow their fan base.

As a host, "you're sharing music you really like with people who probably haven't heard it before, and it's like you're giving this crazy little gift to people," says Jeffery. "You're giving an experience they otherwise wouldn't have, and it's a really beautiful gesture."

My in-laws said Jeffery's show was the highlight of their year, and the best gift they've ever received. The only downside is we likely won't outdo ourselves this Christmas. 🎁

Julie Barnes

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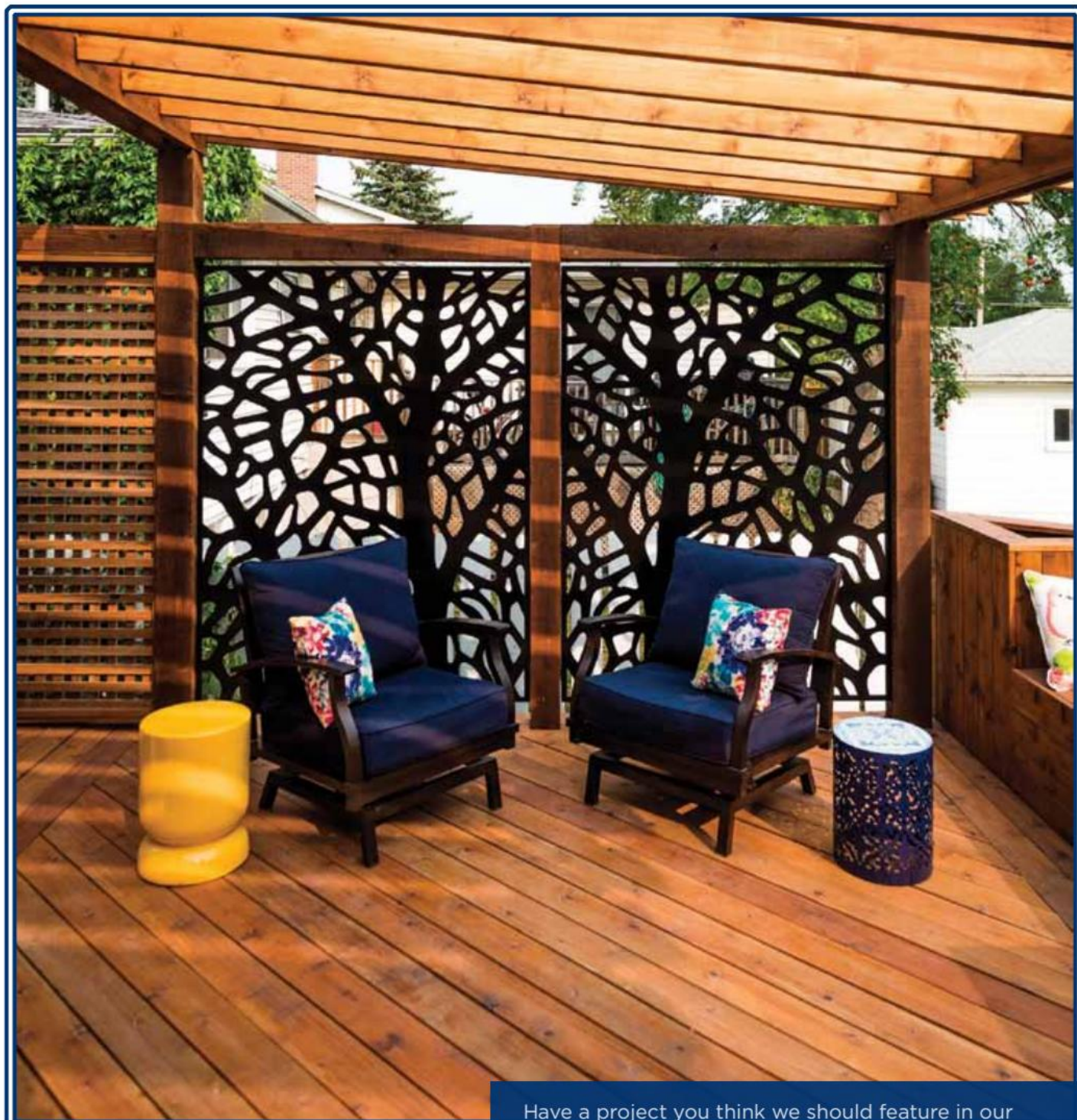
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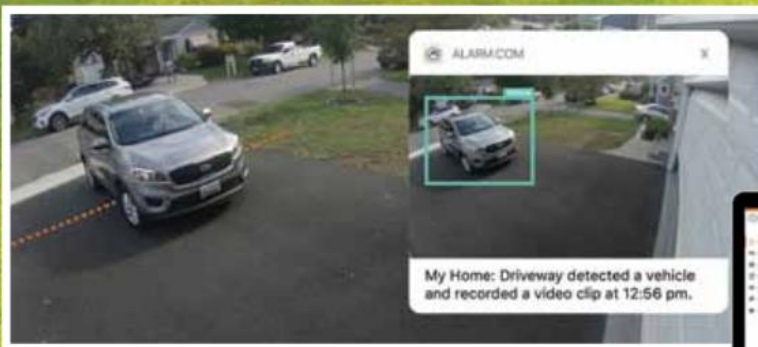
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